

What is claimed is:

1. A touch pad control panel having an outer fascia, comprising:
an outer sensing electrode forming a substantially peripheral boundary with
5 respect to a target area of said outer fascia;
an inner sensing electrode recessed from said outer sensing electrode and
substantially axially aligned within said target area;
a power supply applying an alternating voltage to said inner and outer
sensing electrodes to generate inner and outer sensor signals having respective
10 magnitudes that depend upon the presence of conductive objects approaching said
outer fascia adjacent said target area;
a difference block for generating a difference signal in response to said
respective magnitudes; and
a comparator for comparing said difference signal with a predetermined
15 threshold and generating a switch activation signal in response to said comparison,
wherein said predetermined threshold includes a hysteresis component.

2. The touch pad control panel of claim 1 wherein said alternating voltage
is applied to said inner and outer sensing electrodes on an intermittent basis, and
20 wherein said touch pad control panel further comprises a sample and hold block for
capturing said difference signal when said alternating voltage is being applied.

3. The touch pad control panel of claim 1 wherein said hysteresis
component is generated by a positive feedback circuit coupling an output of said
25 comparator to an input of said comparator.

4. The touch pad control panel of claim 1 wherein said target area of said
outer fascia is recessed within said outer sensing electrode to approach said inner
sensing electrode.

5. A method of detecting a desired switch activation in a touch pad control panel having an outer fascia, said method comprising the steps of:

providing an outer sensing electrode forming a substantially peripheral boundary with respect to a target area of said outer fascia;

providing an inner sensing electrode recessed from said outer sensing electrode and substantially axially aligned within said target area;

applying an alternating voltage to said inner and outer sensing electrodes to generate inner and outer sensor signals having respective magnitudes that depend upon the presence of conductive objects approaching said outer fascia adjacent said target area;

generating a difference signal in response to said respective magnitudes;

comparing said difference signal with a predetermined threshold, wherein said predetermined threshold includes a hysteresis component; and

generating a switch activation signal in response to said comparison.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein said alternating voltage is applied to said inner and outer sensing electrodes on an intermittent basis.

7. The method of claim 6 further comprising the step of:

capturing said difference signal when said alternating voltage is being applied.

8. The method of claim 5 wherein said hysteresis component is generated by positive feedback within said comparing step.